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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIAN DOMESTIC WORKERS IN THE UAE

1.(U) Summary: The Deputy Consul General of Ethiopia in Dubai told Poleconoff April 17 that there are some 30,000 Ethiopians in the UAE, 75 percent of whom work as domestic servants. Many Ethiopians flee from their employers and work illegally in other households or work as prostitutes. He characterized the recruitment of Ethiopian domestic servants as trafficking. He has also heard rumors of Ethiopian women being trafficked to Syria. End Summary.

#### Most Ethiopians Work as Domestic Servants

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12. (U) Tesfay Desalegne, Ethiopia's Deputy Consul General in Dubai, told Poleconoff April 17 that the Ethiopian population in the UAE is estimated to be near 30,000, with the majority living in Dubai. 75 percent, or roughly 22,500 of the Ethiopians in the UAE, work as domestic servants. Most of the Ethiopians are women recruited to work in Emirati households, rather than for expats. Young Ethiopian women vie to work in Dubai because they believe they will be able to earn large salaries, but many are disappointed when they experience the realities of their jobs. Some seek assistance from the Ethiopian Consulate, while others run away from their sponsor to seek new jobs. "Thousands" of runaway domestics had sought assistance from the Consulate since it opened in 2004. The most common complaints were harsh working conditions, non-payment of wages, and physical or sexual abuse.

#### Ethiopian Domestics Not Protected By the Law

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13. (SBU) Desalegne spoke of cases in which Emirati sponsors had avoided paying a domestic worker by canceling the visa without notice or reporting them as an absconder. Once her visa has been canceled, the employee must return to Ethiopia immediately without any legal recourse. The Consulate can do little for such individuals. Desalegne calls the system unfair, saying Emirati sponsors are "never" held accountable in such cases.

#### Choices for Absconding Domestics

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14. (SBU) Desalegne said that most of the women who fled from their sponsors remained in Dubai to seek new employment in the "black market." Many seek work as domestics for Europeans in the Jumeirah area. Although they are vulnerable because they are "absconders," many find the pay and working conditions with American or European families are far better than with the sponsoring Emirati families. In these situations, the benefits

of working illegally far outweigh the risks of being arrested and deported.

#### Prostitution - An Alternative

15. (SBU) Some runaway Ethiopian domestic workers turn to prostitution. Desalegne believes that there may be up to 1000 Ethiopians working as prostitutes in Dubai. He believes that most of the women who turn to prostitution are runaway domestics who are "lured" into it by other Ethiopian women who also were former domestic workers. Aside from the large amounts of money they can earn, Desalegne said that some of the women think that working as a prostitute is "thrilling" and offers "excitement." Large numbers of Ethiopian prostitutes can be found at some of dance clubs at hotels in Dubai. The women Desalegne has spoken with view prostitution as a temporary job, which they will leave behind when they return to Ethiopia. Desalegne did not believe that Ethiopian women were trafficked to the UAE for the sex industry, nor did he know of any cases where Ethiopian women were working in the sex industry against their will.

#### Trafficking Ethiopians to the UAE

16. (SBU) On the other hand, Desalegne characterized much of the recruitment of Ethiopian domestic workers as trafficking. Although Ethiopians come to the UAE voluntarily, the Vice Consul General said, many were deceived by unscrupulous employment agents in Ethiopia, while others were convinced to come to the UAE on visit visas only to find that the promised job was non-existent.

17. (SBU) Many Ethiopians travel via circuitous routes to Dubai, generally via Nairobi, Kenya or Yemen, because Ethiopians traveling to Dubai on Ethiopian Airways are normally required to show proof of employment or other evidence proving legitimate travel. Ethiopians traveling to Dubai on visit visas -- many of

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whom are actually going to look for work or to start a promised job -- are not permitted on Ethiopian's direct flight, so they travel by other routes that are less well policed.

#### Trafficking From the UAE

18. (SBU) Desalegne said it is rumored in the community that some Ethiopian women are trafficked to Syria from the UAE. His understanding is that workers who have absconded or are unhappy in their current jobs are identified and then approached by other Ethiopians who promise them better jobs elsewhere. Those who accept are taken to Al Ain and then taken to Syria. Deslegne added that he has no concrete evidence of trafficking to Syria, but said it is widely rumored among Ethiopians.

#### Limited Resources

19. (U) According to Desalegne, the Ethiopian Consulate has limited resources and is unable to provide much assistance to abused or runaway domestic workers. The Consulate does not run a shelter, nor does it purchase repatriation tickets. The Consulate turns to the Ethiopian Community Association (ECA) for assistance. Generally, the ECA members will provide temporary housing and raise money for repatriation. In return, the Consulate supports ECA fundraising events.

#### Embassy Comment:

10. (SBU) The options available to abused domestics in the UAE is uneven. While the Philippines Labor Attaches in both Abu Dhabi and Dubai, as well as the Labor Officer at the Embassy of Pakistan report that the situation is improving and that they are generally satisfied with the authorities responding to complaints of abuse and non-payment, prosecuting the offenders, and allowing the domestics to change sponsors instead of being summarily deported, serious gaps still remain. As Desalegne states, an unscrupulous employer can report a domestic as an "absconder" leaving them without recourse. In addition to gaps

in protection for the abused, the amount of abuse is largely underreported. On May 15, the English daily Khaleej Times quoted Awatif Abdullah of the Dubai Police Human Rights Department as saying that while statistics indicate a recent decline in reports of abuse against domestics, housemaids rarely file complaints with police authorities, instead turning for help to their consulates or employment agents. In the case of domestics from countries such as Ethiopia, where their embassy does not provide services to their locally employed population like the Philippines does, the abused worker is left with no recourse at all.

¶11. (SBU) Although Desalegne mentioned "trafficking" several times, his comments more accurately describe deceptive employment practices and voluntary alien smuggling. He stated that he has not received any reports of coercion, nor that exorbitant "transaction" fees are charged for work visas essentially trapping the domestics in the UAE as indentured servants. His description of Ethiopian women taking a circuitous route to enter the UAE corroborates statements from officials at the Ministry of Interior and Dubai Immigration, that routes from known trafficking source countries are specifically monitored and screened in an effort to eliminate human trafficking. End Comment.  
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